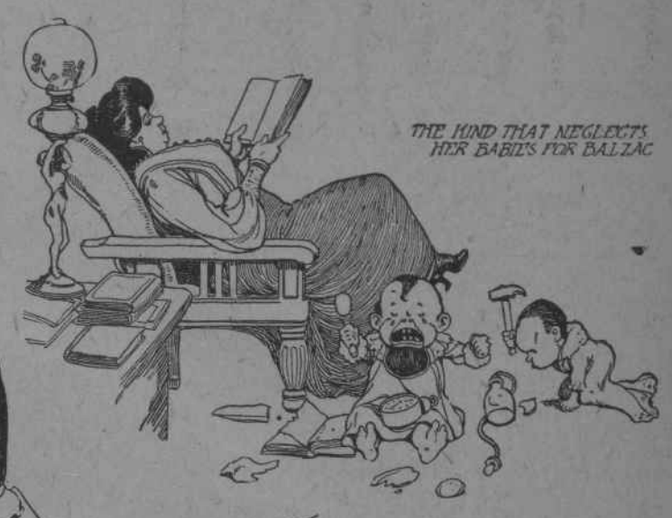
DIANA OF THE TOWER OFF DUTY

By John Kendrick Bangs

A BURLY POLICEMAN CAME ALONG

"WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE COMPARATIVE MERITS OF NEW YORK AND OLYMPUS AS PLACES OF RESIDENCE" I ASKED



THE KIND THAT NEGLECTS HER BABIES FOR BALZAC

WORKING HARD FOR HIS PLEASURE

I was sitting on the roof of the Madison Square Garden the other night, drinking in the beauties of the scene with my eyes, when, suddenly leaning back in my chair and glancing up into the heavens, what was my surprise to discover that the chaste but brazen Diana of the Tower was absent from her post! I rubbed my eyes in amazement that this should be, and my first inclination was to sound an alarm, since I feared that some light fingered Actaeon had intruded again upon the privacy of the presiding genius of Madison square, and, reversing the ancient tale of villany and woe, had made off with her. I sprang to my feet with a muffled cry, when I felt a sudden tug at my sleeve.

"Hush!" whispered a sweet but metallic voice at my side, and, turning, I beheld the missing deity, clad in a lovely gown of exquisite make and unusually summerish pattern, sitting slightly behind me in my box.

"You—here?" I whispered in return. "What does this mean?"

"Only that I occasionally weary of standing on my toes, in more or less feeble imitation of my cousin Mercury, as he used to appear in his famous flying act at the Elysium Roof Garden, and am allowed the relaxation of a visit to earth at certain intervals," the lady replied.

"I should think it would be a good deal of a relief," said I.

"It is indeed," she agreed. "You don't know really what an awful job that is standing up on that pinnacle twenty-four hours a day with nothing to relieve the monotony of it save that which comes from twirling around and around like a weather vane. Just try it yourself once," she added.

"Thank you, my dear Goddess," said I, "but twirling on one foot isn't exactly in my line, especially at such altitudes. It is as much as I can do to twirl on two feet on the surface of the earth, let alone acting as your understudy. I am quite ready to admit that it must be a difficult job."

"There's only one that's equal to it, and that is to be a candidate on a fusion ticket," she sighed.

"What do you know of the difficulties of a fusion candidate?" I demanded. "You never ran for office, did you?"

"No, but my friend Argus did once," she replied. "He thought he'd like to be Mayor of Olympus, and see who got all the money they spent on the gold paving contracts, and the better element from all the parties got together and put him up. They thought a chap with a thousand eyes was just the thing to take hold of the complications of the hour."

"Rather a wise conclusion, seems to me," I observed. "He could keep an eye on everybody."

"Humph!" ejaculated the lady. "Maybe so; but he was a hopeless astigmatist in a week, and before the campaign was over there wasn't an eye in his whole thousand that wasn't crossed with every other with his trying to see where he stood with his own backers."

"Was he elected?" I asked.

"Never," replied Diana. "Nemesis carried the city by 98,000 majority. But Argus used to come around evenings and tell me about his troubles, and I made up my mind that if it ever came to a choice between being a weathercock or a fusion Mayor. I'd cast in my lot with old Boreas and let political ambition alone."

"What do you think of the comparative merits of New York and Olympus as places of residence?" I asked.

"New York is more like the other place," she replied. "Especially in the summer time, when the thermometer begins to clamber up the side of the tower and spend his hours with me. The voice of the city which greets my ears at that height is exactly like that which used to greet the ears of the Olympian gods rising from the depths of Erebus. Did you ever hear the voice of a city like New York?"

"I never did," said I. "What is it like?"

"Well, let me think," said Diana. "I've never been asked to describe it before in precise terms. Did you ever run a file through your teeth?"

"When I was a boy—yes," said I.

"Well, that's the effect the city's voice has upon your nerves," observed the goddess. "If I were asked to write a magazine poem describing it I think I should put it thus:—

"If you take the clang of the trolley cars
And an infant's sharp toned wail,
With a dozen or more of wild huzzas
From the anarchists' hidden trail,

'And a billion notes from Duss's horn,
Plus the siren's strident toot,
With a shriek from the mass of lone and lorn
And the midnight owl's hoot,

"And the sky flung honk of the hurtling goose,
With a groan that's deep as the sea,
And mix them well you will reproduce
The voice that comes up to me."

"I don't wonder you like to come down occasionally," said I, "if that's the sort of thing you have to listen to every day. But does the voice articulate at all?"

"Yes," sighed Diana. "It is continually moaning the message of the town—'Hustle or die! Hustle or die! Hustle or die!' That is the refrain of the song it sings."

"Even in summer?" I demanded. "I've always had an idea that New York was given over to pleasure in summer."

"True enough," said Diana. "But, alas! its the same everlasting hustle to get it. Having fun is serious business in New York, summer or winter, as you will see for yourself by glancing about you at these people you meet on the roof gardens. See that young chap over there with the tall glass in front of him? That's the fifth Scotch high ball he's had since he arrived, and his cigar is the fourth he has smoked. He's working hard for his pleasure, and to-morrow morning he'll be the weariest man in six counties. And those people in that box to your right. They have come in from the country, the cool, beautiful, blessed country, for this, eaten a seven course dinner over at the Farragut Café, and are now full of miserable anxiety for fear the performance will not be over in time for them to catch the midnight train home."

"The place is filled with that sort," I began, as I glanced over the scene.

"And just cast your eyes down there at that table where those three men are sitting—old gray haired men who need nothing so much as sleep. Don't you think they are working hard too? They've been watching a ticker all day and this is the way they rest at night, and just because their families are off spending money at some expensive resort in the Catskills or on the Jersey coast they think they are enjoying the freedom of Bohemia, which consists of laying up the material for a splitting headache to-morrow morning."

"I'd rather be the iceman," said I. "His is a cooler job. But see here, my dear goddess, you don't seem to like the way we take our pleasures."

"No," said she. "Your method is too strenuous and restless for me. Of a summer's night I should much prefer the cool of the grass in the parks to rest my weary bones on, the light of the moon to guide me hither and yon and the music of the rustling trees to enchant mine ear. With a gorgeous moon in the sky, and real stars twinkling out a friendly greeting to everybody, the bulk of you turn your backs upon the multitude of park acres that lie all about you, clamber aboard a stuffy elevator and hie yourselves to an overcrowded spot 200 feet above the pavement, glaring with red, white and blue electric lights, and spend your precious hours watching constellations of frail humanity wearing their bodies and souls out in a mad antical effort to make you think you are having a good time."

I laughed at the lack of consistency between the lady's views and her own presence at this function.

"I don't notice that you are down below there in the park yourself, my dear Diana," I said.

"No," said she. "That's another trouble with your little old New York. I tried it the other night, and after choosing a sequestered spot on the lawn, where I could hear the tinkling music of the fountain, I had barely dozed off into that comfortable drowse that takes you to the edge of dreamland when a burly policeman came along and gave me the merry bastinado upon my tired soles. You not only have a confirmed and constitutional antipathy to rest as individuals, but a statutory and official inhibition constantly and continuously operates to keep you moving. If I were asked to design a crest for the people of the city of New York today I should choose a citizen dormant on an azure field, overmastered by a blue coated official rampant, whacking his heels with a club flagellant in his dexter hand, while holding aloft the national motto, 'Move On!' embroidered upon a fluttering ribbon in his fist sinister as a substitute for the more familiar, but less descriptive, E Pluribus Unum. Consciously or unconsciously, you people have chosen this as your slogan until 'Move On!' has become the battle cry of freedom, and whether you are playing or working in the High Court of Humanity, there isn't a man jack of you in these strenuous times that can't be convicted of exceeding the speed limit. You have become perfectly yellow with what I should call 'automobilamics.'"

"Then you don't believe in the moral conveyed in that exquisite poem narrating the doings of the lad who

Bore 'mid snow and ice
A banner with the strange device
'Excelsior?' "

I asked.

"I do not," said the lady. "Excelsior is good material to stuff hotel mattresses and doll babies with, but for myself I think the young man who lost his life advertising that particular brand of health food was, in the expressive phraseology of your countrymen, a Willie Boy."

"I should very much like your opinion, my dear goddess," said I, "on the subject of the new woman."

"You mean the kind that neglects her babies for Balzac, and who prefers writing papers on 'The Influence of Herbert Spencer Upon the Navajo Indians' to darning her husband's socks?" she demanded.

"Something of that sort," said I. "Do you approve of those ladies?"

"I most certainly do," she replied. "They are to be encouraged in the work they do, for don't you see a woman who prefers Balzac to her baby, if she devoted her time to the latter, would probably kill him before she had him six weeks; and the miseries of a husband whose socks had been darned by a woman whose mind during the operation was ranging through the Navajo country in the train of Herbert Spencer would be appalling. Such a woman, in her preoccupation, would darn the big hole at that point of the sock where her husband's foot should go in, and then the poor fellow wouldn't be able to wear it at all."

"We have been having some lucid papers on the subject of coeducation recently," I observed. "Would you mind stating for publication whether you believe in it?"

"I believe in it in two cases," she replied. "After marriage and at dancing school. Otherwise not. The more a husband and wife learn things together, the less they have to explain to each other afterward with that irritating assumption of superiority which the more knowledgeable of two persons invariably affects when he or she is telling somebody something he or she thinks he or she doesn't know, and at dancing school satisfactory results are never attained when two boys and two girls dance together. The waltz should be constantly differentiated from a football match or a five o'clock tea. But my general attitude toward coeducation was shown many years ago when I was one of the leaders of the Olympian Society. There was a man named Actaeon, as you may have heard, who tried to join my swimming class for ladies, in the days long since passed"——

"I read of the incident," said I.

"Well, you know what happened to him?" the lady queried.

"You turned him into a deer, I believe," I replied.

"Yes," laughed Diana, "he has been a stag party ever since."

I leaned back in my chair to laugh at my chance companion's jest, and then, turned to congratulate her upon her humor, but she had disappeared, and a moment later, glancing upward at the moon, I discovered that she had resumed her place upon the tower, whence, much to my jealous chagrin, I observed that she was strenuously endeavoring to get up a flirtation with the comet, who must have been in a receptive mood, for as I left the roof and wandered slowly homeward I noticed he was wagging his tail like a Skye terrier with the vision of a good supper before him.

The Hero, the Husband and the Boy.

by Dolores Marbourg Bacon

CHALMERS did not like martial music and very greatly disapproved of the military, and yet Chalmers was not unpatriotic.

Hearing without the military music he so hated, Chalmers rose up from his divan and twitched together the heavy curtains at the front windows, thereby shutting off the view from the little boy who stood there watching.

"But they are heroes! heroes! Mr. Chalmers—every one," the boy said in an aggrieved tone.

"Well," said Chalmers, "I'm willing." And he lay down again upon his back, with one foot cocked over his knee, his hands clasped behind his head and his elbows hugged over his ears. Chalmers certainly did hate the military uncommonly.

"I wonder if Mrs. Chalmers is looking out of the drawing room window?" said the boy. "I hope so. It's all because of her father—that marching there, and—I do hope she is looking."

"Well, Norman, I can imagine—with an effort—a way of finding out."

"You mean—to cross the hall?"

"Exactly!—to cross the hall."

"I'll go."

"Thank you," returned Chalmers. Probably he could not have spoken without a touch of irony in his tone if he had tried—and he didn't try.

As Norman turned toward the door Mrs. Chalmers entered hurriedly. When she saw Chalmers she paused just an instant, but not long enough to flatter him. She threw the curtains wide and opened the window. Norman looked at Chalmers, then he too went to the window. The boy always responded to the lady's love of military spectacles. Perhaps it was the boy of it.

"It's the anniversary of the day your father did something, isn't it, Mrs. Chalmers? Your father was a great hero, wasn't he—Mrs. Chalmers? They—they are doing things with their swords, aren't they—Mrs. Chalmers?" Still no answer. Mrs. Chalmers was looking out.

"They are. Look at their buttons—look at their buttons," he cried, at last too pleased with what he saw to care whether he was listened to or not."

"Don't you think you may have made fuss enough?" Chalmers asked.

The boy was abashed, and turned quickly from the window.

"I did not mean to annoy you," he said, with a seeming of self-repression that belonged to him.

"You didn't annoy me," Chalmers returned, quickly. Then he arose from the divan and took from the floor a scarf which his wife in her haste had dropped.

"I—I—fear you will take cold," he said, with something of the little boy's diffidence, as he placed the scarf about his wife's shoulders.

She turned and looked at him with much deliberation. She was as cold in manner as a truly passionate woman knows how to be.

"Thank you," she said, and closed the window.

"I—I have not seen you in several days," Chalmers hesitated. "You are well?"

"I am well, thank you."

"Dinner will be served presently," said Chalmers, with eagerness in pose and tone. "Do—do we dine together?"

"I dine at home to-night—if you mean that," she replied.

"Yes; and will you await dinner here?"

"As well here as elsewhere," she acquiesced. Chalmers had a courtly way. He motioned toward a chair near the fire, and Mrs. Chalmers caught her breath, as she always did when she observed in him that tone and manner. She hoped Chalmers' mind was on something else.

"Well, sir?" said Chalmers, looking over her head at Norman.

The boy had been standing quite apart, watching them wistfully. When Chalmers spoke he started.

"You want something?" asked Mrs. Chalmers, looking coldly at him.

"I"—— he hesitated.

"Speak up," said Chalmers, testily.

"I wondered if—to-night, you would mind if I had my dinner with you—or with the housekeeper; if you had rather not"—— he continued hurriedly.

"Why with us—or the housekeeper"——

"The music and the gold braid and—every one so gay, and"——

Chalmers looked stoically at the fire, but he felt very pitiful.

"You mean that you are lonesome?" queried Mrs. Chalmers.

"Yes."

"You may dine with—us," she returned, shortly, and looked back at the fire, as Chalmers had.

"Thank you," said the boy.

"Er—wait here—till dinner is served." She indicated a cushion at her feet.

"I am going to the country to-morrow," said Chalmers, stiffly. "I'll take you with me—if you choose. You can have a look at the dogs—if you choose."

"Thank you, sir." And at that moment the music floated in from the street. Norman began, boylike, to drum with his fingers.

"That's fine!" he said, with unconscious enthusiasm. "Was my father a hero?" Chalmers and his wife looked at each other and then, contemptuously, at the little boy. When his wife looked at him Chalmers reddened and turned about.

"Norman," he said, "if it will not disappoint you too much, will you dine with us some other night?"

"Yes, sir." And Norman rose.

"And—my boy—that trip to the country to-morrow; I shall be delighted to have you go."

"Thank you," Norman said again, with a deprecatory smile.

"Norman," called Mrs. Chalmers, "since Mr. Chalmers prefers that you do not dine with us, I will tell you stories, here, after you have had your tea—if—if you wish it."

He wished it, and left the room.

Man and wife were silent for a moment, then Chalmers spoke.

"You did not mind that I dismissed him, did you?"

"Why should I mind?"

"I will try and make it up to him to-morrow."

"And I—after dinner."

"Perhaps we have not—considered the boy enough."

"Perhaps I have not"——

"Oh, yes you have. I was thinking of my own remissness."

"You know more about that than I do," she returned, pointedly. "I wish you would sit down." Chalmers sat down. "I have wished to speak with you about this matter—with your permission."

Chalmers wished she would not be so cursedly courteous.

"It is but natural that a man should be demonstrative toward his own son," she began. "I have thought you restrained yourself on my account. If this is true I do not wish it any more; it is unfair to the boy"——

"Now I beg of you," began Chalmers.

——"to be more kind to him? I fear I am not very thoughtful of him; I mean to be."

"You are," he said. "Why did you take charge of him? Because you hated me utterly?"

"I did not hate you. Perhaps," she said, slowly, "perhaps I did it because of the love I once bore his father."

"I never told you I was his father."

"You brought him to this house to live—if I would keep him."

"Might not that have been the impulsive act of conscious innocence?"

"Why," she said, with deliberation, "men do make fools of themselves occasionally, I suppose."

"Why not I, then?"

"I asked you whose child he was and"——

"When I had no ready answer you assumed that I was the man."

"You never denied it."

"My God! I can't," cried Chalmers, rising.

"That is something to your credit," she answered, crimping the hem of her gown.

"Since you decided that the boy was mine, why did you have him here?"

"That," she said, slowly, "is one of those things a man is constitutionally unable to understand."

"Try to make me understand."

"Well, your son must have my care, since he has no mother."

"But I can't understand."

"I told you you couldn't. Do you not see, since you seemed to regret that his existence forever separated you from me, I wanted you should have some compensation?"

Chalmers grew excited and stammered as he spoke. "You did it for love of me, because I 'seemed' to regret. You cannot call it 'seeming' when every throb of my heart was for you."

"It throbbed for another—there's the boy, you know."

"What satisfaction could I feel in the daily presence of this wretched child?"

"None, perhaps. But I may be forgiven for thinking that you still have left some remnant of honorable and gentle feeling. A man's own son"——

"You took the child in for love of me, believing it to be mine. For love of me! Say it, Dorothy, say it!"

"For the love I had felt"——

"Love cannot die in an hour. You had been my wife less than two years"——

"And that boy was less than a year old. I assure you, love can die in a minute under favorable circumstances."

"Suppose I were to tell you this boy is not mine?"

She started forward in her chair. If loves dies quickly the habit of hope does not. "Suppose I were to ask you:—'Whose child is he?' " she answered, hoarsely.

"Why, it might be—any one's."

"Norman once told me that a little boy 'might eat a bear,' " she replied. Mrs. Chalmers was articulating with difficulty. This was to be a Waterloo—for somebody on Napoleon's side.

"Dorothy, in Heaven's name—you love me to-day as you did in that first year of our married life. It is true. Dorothy, I did not dare dream of that before, but now I know it. I cannot let this hour pass—give me one chance—the benefit of the doubt. Oh, Dorothy!"

"There is no doubt," she said, staring at him. She hoped for something, she didn't know what.

"Let us be reconciled. When I believed you hated me I had no power to plead, but now for God's sake, Dorothy"——

"I—I"——

"Don't speak, don't speak," Chalmers cried. He was holding out his arms.

"What shall I do?" she murmured, twisting her fingers and looking at Chalmers' open arms and remembering the feel of them about her in the old days. "What shall I do?" And then Norman laughed, just without the library door. They started as the same shaft struck them both.

"For the last time," she said, hurriedly and under her breath, "who is his father?"

"I said it—might be any one; it might—why, it might be your father"—— Chalmers was speaking convulsively, or he would never have said it.

"My father," she repeated. Then Mrs. Chalmers seemed to assemble her wits. "My father—who loved you as his own son, whose memory great men celebrated to-day; my father, who loved my mother and her children next to honor! A hero first, last and forever, whose word was truth, whose life was truth! Take that back," she said, looking for all the world like the old general himself.

"I—take it back," answered Chalmers. "But I love you so"—— Chalmers seemed to be about done for.

"Madam is served," spoke the very discreet servant.

"I cannot dine to-night," she said, and passed out at another door.

Chalmers stood in the middle of the floor and looked off where his wife had gone.

"I will do it," he said, suddenly. "This is hell, and I'll tell the truth." He unlocked the small drawer of a cabinet near his desk. "And yet, maybe—she would hate me for the truth. She loves me now, for certain. I wonder just how bad the truth would sound. It's years since even I heard it—years," he mused as he took a letter from the drawer. He spread it carefully upon the desk. It seemed not to have been read frequently, and it told how Dorothy's hero father had made a mess of his affairs, and how his conscience was troubling him now that he was dying, and how he trusted to his beloved son-in-law to square things for him and for his conscience—and for a boy who was not his wife's. "I have not the courage," he had written, "to remember the boy in my will, lest it excite suspicion, and now I'm dying I haven't time to make other arrangements."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Chalmers. "If I should die and Dorothy never know that I was always as true, as true"—— Chalmers wiped the sweat from his face.

" 'If Dorothy found I was not the hero she always thought me I should turn in my grave,' " Chalmers read. " 'Haven't the courage to ignore the child's existence; his mother is dead. She was a woman I knew in Paris. The boy ought to be looked after—leave all to you' "——

"By Jove! It sounds worse than I thought," murmured Chalmers. "No, I guess I won't—but I'd rather be a dead hero than a live one. I won't tell her about the old man, after all. Well, what the dev—— What is it, Norman?"

"I came to hear the story," said Norman from the doorway. Chalmers hurriedly thrust the letter into the drawer and fumblingly dropped the key upon the floor. While he was trying to find it without overturning his chair or rising from it Norman stood upon the hearthrug watching him. "I'm to hear a story about her father."

Chalmers, failing to find the key, left the room, and Mrs. Chalmerrs entered it.

"Your father was a hero, all right, wasn't he, Mrs. Chalmers?" said Norman, sitting back on his heels.

"Yes," she answered.

"My father wasn't, was he?" wistfully. "Mr. Chalmers once said he was not."

"Are you very fond of Mr. Chalmers?"

"I—I—don't know, madam. I think he is very good." The boy paused. Then:—"Would you mind if I loved you very much?"

"There is no reason why you should love me at all," she replied, coldly.

"I should be glad if you loved me. You do not," pausing, "do you, Mrs. Chalmers? No one does, do they?" He was becoming hysterical in his syntax, and she moved uneasily.

"I'm sorry if I am not kind"——

"Yes, you are; but I guess we aren't very happy." He made furtive use of the portiere about his eyes. Mrs. Chalmers mechanically picked up the key at her feet.

"It's Mr. Chalmers' key," said Norman, still in the curtains. "It belongs to the drawer of the cabinet." Mrs. Chalmers looked long at the key and longer at the cabinet. Chalmers' secret long had dwelt there, she knew it, and she had not before permitted her gown to brush the cabinet as she passed by, but to-night things seemed different. She looked at the key and then fitted it to the lock. There was but one letter in the drawer, and that bore her father's writing. Mrs. Chalmers was a miserable woman and longed that night to be near her father. She fingered the letter, and Norman snuffed softly and looked out at the winking street lights. All the glory of the military had now departed and it was raining.

"She found your key, Mr. Chalmers," said Norman from the window as Chalmers stood shaking in the doorway.

First she read the letter, then she was a long, long time in Chalmers' arms, and then a small voice said amazedly:—

"I never saw you do that before."

Chalmers began to laugh and could not stop.

"I'll be all right to-morrow," he sobbed, "but to-night I've gone clean mad. I know now that happiness might kill."

Nothing ever went wrong again with Mr. or Mrs. Chalmers, and every day thereafter the boy had the "time of his life," according to his own account.